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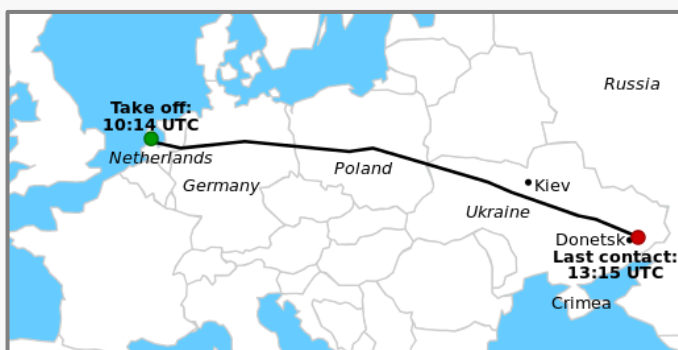
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Malaysian Airlines accident accelerating the Ukrainian crisis



Route map of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. Map: Geordie Bosanko

In July the Ukrainian crisis attracted more international attention than ever since it broke out in the end of 2013. The outrage was triggered by the tragedy of MH17, the Malaysian Airline's jet that was allegedly shot down in Eastern Ukraine, close to the Russian border on 17 July. The plane was supposed to transport its passengers from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. There was a total of 295 people from 10 different nations on the board, and no survivors were recorded.

The circumstances of the tragedy are still unclear, but as Eastern Ukraine is a problematic conflict-zone where the clashes between the separatists and the pro-government forces are continuous, they immediately started to blame each other both in political circles and in the media. So far, there has not been any

decisive proof from any of the parties so all the international community can do is looking for proofs and guessing.

There seems to be a consensus in Western Europe and in the USA that the plane was shot down by separatists, who got their weapons and missiles from Russia, with the consent of Putin. As experts say, if a missile is responsible for the crash, it must have been a heavy weapon as the plane flew on a really high altitude. This implies either a mistake or an act of terrorism. It is also suspicious that one day before the crash the EU and the USA imposed more financial sanctions against Russia. Putin denies all the charges, putting the blame on the Ukrainian government. As he said, "the country in whose airspace this happened bears responsibility for it".

Both Russia and Ukraine agreed to international observers to bring off a fair investigation. Many OSCE observers take part in the process, but according to their statements, it is far from an independent and objective investigation. As it is a rebel-controlled area, some of them were not granted with full access to the site and the evidences, while many report about rebels moving the bodies. In a response, they told





Map of the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. Map: Alex1961 [Wikimedia Commons]

that it was only needed because of public health reasons as the corpses lied in high temperature for too long time. Whatever the motive was, the integrity of the site is compromised that can be an obstacle of real conclusions.

Among others, the EU also called for international investigation and considers the events clean indicators that the crisis has to be stopped immediately with a ceasefire accepted by both sides. As most of the victims were EU citizens, even more serious sanctions are expected from Brussels' side. It can include a restriction of access to EU capital markets for state-owned Russian companies, a ban on the trade of arms and on products that can be used for both civilian and military purposes. Merkel added that Russia must acknowledge its responsibility and called other states to continue with further sanctions. David Cameron would bring the

case to the UN Security Council as he claims that there are evidences suggesting that the separatists shot down the MH17. In a 30-minute phone call, he asked the Russian President to facilitate the investigations and to put a pressure on the rebels to stop the violence.

From all the EU member states, The Netherlands suffered the biggest loss. From 295 dead 193 were Dutch. Most of them headed to the International Aids Conference so the loss concerns the scientific life as well. Hearing the tragic news, many brought flowers to the Dutch Embassy in Kiev. Even Vladimir Putin called Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, promising a full and independent inquiry.

Apart from the tragic number of victims, it has to be noted that it can have serious consequences on the economy and the stock market as well, effecting the value of Malaysian Airlines. The MH17 was the second 'accident' that happened this year to the company, as on 8 May one of its jets got lost and is still missing. Since then, more and more stakeholders are giving up their part, which means millions of US dollar.



MH17 memorial at Amsterdam International Airport. Photo: PersianDutchNetwork



Increasingly strained relations between Ukraine and Russia

Days before the Malaysian airplane crash near the Russian border on the 17th of July and the following mutual recriminations from both sides, tensions were already rising between Ukrainian forces and separatist forces in that region. Only hours after Poroshenko's government had announced the end of the 10-day ceasefire, which had eventually been installed with the help of the foreign ministers of Germany and France on the 23rd of June, Ukrainian

though Russia supported the proposal to give Ukrainian border guards and OSCE representatives access to Russian territory to take part in controlling two border crossings, the end of the ceasefire saw an increase in fighting the eastern part of the country. For its part, Russia urged Ukraine to reinstall the ceasefire, after at least 200 people have been killed and another 600 injured since the start of Kiev's so called "anti-terrorist operation" in eastern Ukraine.

“even though Barack Obama is denying it, the Cold War is in full play”

forces launched a full-scale military operation against pro-Russian separatists in eastern parts of the country.

In his announcement, Ukraine's foreign minister claimed, that "negotiations are possible only after the rebels lay down their arms once and for all" and that the government would do everything possible to defend its Ukrainian people. Poroshenko's government is under public pressure, with the West and the Ukrainian population believing that Russia is providing the rebels with troops and weapons, including tanks and rocket launchers. Even

During the last operation by the Ukrainian military, pro-separatist rebels have vowed to regroup in Donetsk and Luhansk after government forces retook Slovyansk, a major rebel stronghold. While also the number of Ukrainian refugees in Russia increased to 110,000 people, with 54,400 having been internally displaced, Russia is well aware of the escalation of the situation, also facing major sanctions against his government put in place by the EU and Washington. Even though Barack Obama is denying it, the Cold War is in full play.



Foreign diplomats leaving Libya as the clashes intensify

Early in July a battle started in Tripoli, Libya when Islamist militias launched a surprise attack on the airport against the rival militias – mostly anti-Gaddafi rebels – to take over the control there. As the fights in the country has got to a high intense between the militias by the end of the month, the United States decided to close its embassy in Tripoli for a while in Libya. The diplomats travelled to Tunisia having military protection and will continue their diplomatic service on Libyan issues from there. The State Department warned the American citizens staying in Libya to leave the country immediately.

The fear of an attack against the US Embassy is based on the 2012 events when the Ambassador of the US to Libya, Chris Stevens and other three Americans were killed owing to an assault in Benghazi. Therefore the embassy in Tripoli operated with reduced number of staff since. Not only the United States closed its diplomatic representation in Libya but Turkey as well and the United Nations' aid groups and foreign envoys had also left before the Americans. Due to the shelling in Tripoli many residents have been forced to leave the city. During the fights an oil tank



Muammar al-Gaddafi at the AU summit. Photo: US Navy



containing six million litres of fuel burst into flames and the residents had to leave their homes within five kilometres. The fire-fighters were trying to put out the fire for hours, but finally they ran out of water and the government asked for international aid so several countries sent fire-fighting aircrafts to help the Libyan government. The oil tank was the property of the National Oil Corp owned by the state and the company warned of environmental and humanitarian catastrophe. By the end of the month, about 97 people were killed in Tripoli during the clashes and 38 more died in Benghazi.

But to mention good news as well, the kidnapped Tunisian diplomats – who were abducted in spring by an Islamic extremist group – were released in Libya. And the Tunisian president has said that they still consider the Libyans as their brothers and not as the “minority who committed this crime”. The borders between Libya and its

neighbours will be secured by joint forces, though. Libya’s Foreign Minister, Mohamed Abdelaziz asked the United Nations for help by training their forces to be able to protect the vital oil fields, airports and other areas against the Islamic militias in order to prevent the collapse of the country – as the oil terminals blocked by a separatist group earlier caused Libya a loss of 30 billion dollars.

This help would mean only security and not intervention. What is more, the Libyan Parliament clearly refuses to approve international intervention saying “dialogue remains the only way to resolve differences among the Libyans”.

This battle is the worst violence in Libya since the uprising in 2011 which led to the death of Muammar Gaddafi. And during the latest clashes a new “Islamic Emirate” has been established by the al-Qaeda-linked extremist group Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi.

“Libya’s Foreign Minister, Mohamed Abdelaziz asked the United Nations for help by training their forces to be able to protect the vital oil fields, airports and other areas against the Islamic militias”



Afghan elections are far from expected

The 2014 Afghan elections were supposed to put an end to the country's troubled past and form a secure basis for democratic transition. But even if the elections were held peacefully without major incidents, it seems that there will not be any improvement in the near future; the votes induced a huge political and economic crisis that can have further impact on the country's social situation.

The main electoral opponents are Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani-Ahmadzai, who in April got 45 and 32 per cent of the votes. Not surprisingly, everybody expected former Afghan Foreign Minister, Abdullah Abdullah to win. But the events turned into the opposite way: announced on 7 July,



Afghan presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah. Photo: US Department of State



Afghan presidential candidate Ashraf Ghani. Photo: US Department of State

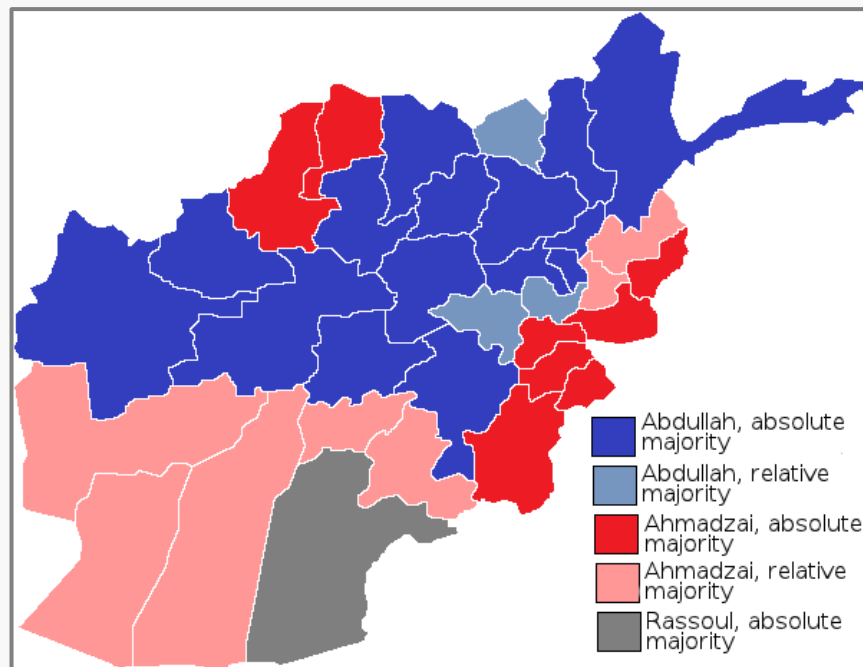
Ghani got 59 per cent – twice as many than a few months before. Abdullah now suspects that Ghani's team committed electoral fraud and that the Independent Election Commission was also involved.

As expected, Ghani asked to publish and validate the results as soon as possible, but at the same time agreed to further investigations to end the political crisis. In the meantime, Abdullah asks the government to withhold the results as they probably do not represent the public will. As the investigations are going on with 80 teams working on it in two shifts, it seems that they both took illegal steps to win the elections. The fights and difficulties are not seen only in the political arena as they



cause tensions in the whole Afghan society. Only in the past six months, 35,000 workers lost their job, 16,000 of which was employed in Bagram Airfield. Several factories closed temporary, waiting for the elections' outcome. Until that, the

production simply stopped and the employees do not receive their salaries. As a result, foreign capital is flowing out of the country, taking the chance away from economic development.



Map of Afghan presidential election, 2014. Map: Haghal Jagul

Afghan constitution to be amended

According to press reports, Afghanistan's political leadership agreed on changing significant parts of the Constitution. In accordance, the current system will be turned into a prime ministerial one that would help the separation of powers. The change was agreed by US State Secretary John Kerry and will have an impact on the electoral system as well.

89 civilians dead in Paktika incident

A deadly suicide attack in Paktika region of Afghanistan left 89 dead and 42 injured, including many children. The suicide bomber detonated a vehicle near a mosque as well as a market when a lot of people were available on the streets. The public opinion and the media immediately accused the Taliban, even though their spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid denied the charges.



Postponed truce between Israel and Hamas



Map of the Gaza strip. Map: Lencer [Wikimedia Commons]

The United States urged both Israel and Palestine to make truce in order to resolve the calm in the region and save the civilians. The US Secretary of State John Kerry has already talked to the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, while the White House Middle East coordinator Philip Gordon has met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The US' aim is to restore the 2012 ceasefire. So the United States is ready to assist in ceasing the fights

between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Though, according to the US President Barack Obama it is Israel's right to defend itself against the assaults by any of the terrorist organizations. Netanyahu told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee that a ceasefire is "not even on the agenda". Obama said the security of the civilians has to be restored in the first place. The State Department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki told the journalists that Israel's tactics basically differs from the Hamas', saying Israel is forewarning Palestinian civilians of upcoming air strikes against the infrastructure and known terrorist operatives, while Hamas is firing at Israeli areas "indiscriminately" ignoring whether there are civilians or not. Senator Lindsey Graham is proposing a resolution to reassure the US' support for Israel and warn the Palestinian Authority to abolish its unity government with Hamas.

Washington warned Israel against any kind of ground invasion in Gaza saying it would claim even more civilian victims. The death toll in the Gaza Strip has already reached up to 177. But neither Israel nor Hamas is willing to end the fights since they have not seen any real efforts as for truce from the



other side so far. In Gaza City due to an Israeli initial airstrike the death toll has raised and according to human rights groups 75 percent of the victims were non-combatants and more than a quarter of them were children.

After that the number of the victims rose up to 571 – including at least 150 children – by 21 July due to the Israeli ground invasion against Gaza, Obama instructed John Kerry to call for immediate truce on the negotiations in Cairo. Kerry was accidentally recorded when querying the “pin-point” accuracy of the Israeli attacks they had told about earlier. The ground invasion started on 17 July and was supposed to end earlier but then the Israeli government realized the tunnel network was more extensive than they had thought before. According to a former Israeli

negotiator, Mike Herzog, the government will be willing to negotiate about the cease-fire only after having the network destroyed in Gaza. A military historian and former Israeli ambassador to the US, Michael Oren said that the detecting of all the tunnels is, actually, impossible and nothing will stop Hamas to rebuild them if Israel succeeds.

A UN-run school operating as a shelter for Palestinian families was shelled by the Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip in late July killing at least 15 people and wounding 200 others. United Nations Secretary-General condemned this act and travelled to Cairo to meet John Kerry. Israeli military is still investigating the incident whether the rockets came from the Israel Defence Forces or the Gaza terrorists. The families who gathered in the courtyard of the



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv, Israel, on July 23, 2014. Photo: US Department of State



school were waiting to be evacuated in a Red Cross convoy. Britain warned Gaza to accept a humanitarian cease-fire unconditionally but the leader of Hamas, Khaled Meshaal said they will stop fighting only in terms of easing the Israeli restrictions on the people in Gaza. The Palestinian death toll in Gaza has climbed over 760; at least 32 Israeli soldiers were killed along with about three civilians.

The US, Turkey, Qatar and Egypt are trying to mediate between Israel and Hamas to broker a cease-fire. In the meantime, Netanyahu is urging the UN to investigate that the Hamas have been using hospitals and schools as weapon depots and Ban Ki-moon also expressed his concern about this decision as the civilians, mainly the children are much more threatened this way. And the Israeli government unanimously rejected the truce proposed by John Kerry saying its conditions were rather in favour of Hamas.

In the end of July Benjamin Netanyahu declared they would not stop fighting until completing their mission – destroying the tunnels of Hamas. He added that the

tunnels “have the sole purpose of destroying our citizens, killing our children”. Meanwhile other explosions killed 10 people – including children – in Gaza City on one of the holiest days of Islam. Hamas accused the Israeli military of airstrikes that caused the explosions but the Israel Defence Forces denied the charges saying Gaza militants might have failed with rocket firing. After the incident Hamas launched three rockets to southern Israel as a revenge and in the evening a gunfight broke out as Gaza militants invaded southern Israel via a tunnel. At least one militant and five soldiers died in the fight.

On 28 July, the UN Security Council warned of an “immediate and unconditional humanitarian cease-fire”. But neither of the belligerents is willing to accept truce. Netanyahu charged Hamas with using the civilians as human shields. The conflict has claimed more than 1000 victims in Gaza so far, at least the 70 percent of them were civilians. And Israel has lost 53 soldiers. However the fights are going on endangering more and more innocent people on both sides.



Flag of Hamas. Picture: Orthuberra [Wikimedia Commons]



Kurds want independence as Iraq is falling apart



Emblem of Kurdistan Regional Government. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

The Kurdistan Regional Government wanted to hold a vote to become independent from Iraq in the beginning of the month but the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki refused it, saying it would be unconstitutional. He added that nobody has the right to take advantage of the current crisis in the country. In the current situation the country has to be united and

the most important is to ensure the country's security. The president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Masoud Barzani has said that the referendum is supposed to be held within months. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu supports the referendum as well.

However, Barzani has told the parliament to form an independent electoral commission to organize the referendum on independence. The US called on Barzani not to separate the semi-autonomous region from Iraq and join a national unity government but Barzani had told earlier to the US Secretary of State John Kerry that he could hardly imagine Iraq staying together. The most relevant issue which is controversial between the two sides is the insufficient payment to the region from the government in Baghdad. The fact that the oil city of Kirkuk is under the control of the Kurds makes the situation more complicated. Not only the US is urging Kurdistan to remain a part of Iraq, but Turkey as well, since it can prompt the Kurdish people to separate themselves within its own borders too. And Kurdistan would need economic relations with Turkey as an autonomous region. Baghdad cut



the payments as revenge after turning out that the Kurdish region exported oil without permission. US diplomats and Baghdad threatened any buyer from the Kurdish tanker filled with oil at Morocco to face legal consequences. Though, the Kurdistan Regional Government has already started the preparations for the independence referendum, the region's economy seems to be stalled since they cannot sell their oil supplies or even refine them for their own use, however, Kurdistan could be a world-class producer.

Barzani said they would not give up on the referendum and he has complained that the constitution has not been implemented yet. According to the Kurdish leader the Prime Minister, al-Maliki himself has violated the constitution many times so far and it contributed to the disunity of the country. Barzani also suggested Maliki to resign after

the prime minister had accused the Kurdish to provide shelter for the militants – including ISIS – who are fighting against the government. The Kurdish leader called the prime minister “hysterical” and the Kurdish political bloc refused to take part in the national government as a protest against Maliki. But according to Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd minister, the political blocs should form a government as soon as possible to create a new federal Iraq based on the constitution, otherwise, the country would fail.

In the end of July the Kurd candidate, Fouad Massoum won the presidential elections – as according to an unofficial agreement the prime minister is Shiite, the president is Kurd and the parliament speaker is Sunni. Maliki considered the result as another step towards democracy despite of their conflict.



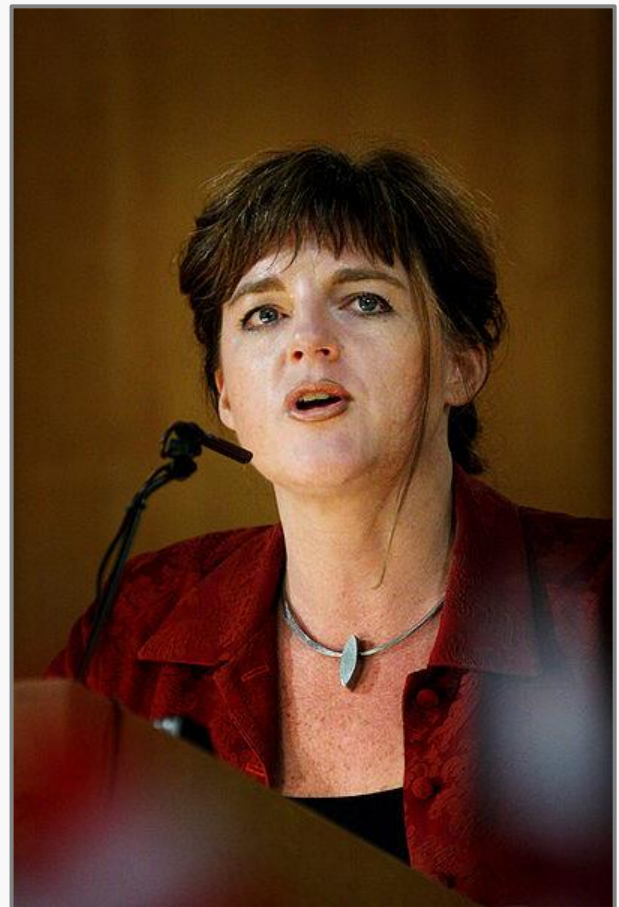
The location of Kurdistan. Map: Panonian [Wikimedia Commons]



The war escalates in South Sudan while famine threatens

According to the head of UN Mission in South Sudan, Hilde Johnson, in the next few months the country might face so serious famine like never before. She said that some parts of the country cannot be approached by road and this fact makes it difficult to deliver the aid everywhere. Johnson called the fighting parties to end the war and make peace in order to save the country and its citizens. The battle began in December, last year and since then far more than one million people have been forced to leave their homes and at least seven million citizens are threatened by starvation. The UNMISS also provides shelter for about 100,000 refugees. They also managed to ensure accountability in favour of the victims of sexual violence, murder and other crimes committed by both the government and the rebels. And the UN also suspects that both parties have violated the international human rights and humanitarian law.

The European Union has also taken steps to prompt the parties to end the war by imposing sanctions, including the renewal of the arms embargo. However, the latter has barely seemed to work as the parties are still able to access weapons. The



Hilde Frafjord Johnson. Photo: Norden.org

sanctions are welcomed but also argued at the same time since they are supposed to stop the war but on the other hand their targets are only individuals – the presidential guards commander, Gen Marial Chinuong Yol on the government



side and Gen Peter Gatdet Yak on the rebels side – who do not have much power in terms of the decision making and the financial background of the conflict. Deng was accused of taking part in the recapture of Bentiu in May while Gadet was charged with being the leader of an anti-government attack which caused the death of at least 200 civilians in Bentiu. The government condemned the EU sanctions. The opposition leader, Riek Machar would prefer regional sanctions to be more effective in ending the fights. Machar called for this the members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development who are mediating between the two sides. He came up with instances like closing the oil pipelines and imports and exports avoiding Mombasa and accused the government of paying for Ugandan forces to stay in South Sudan. The US Secretary of State John Kerry threatened Machar to impose sanctions against him if he refused to take part in the peace talks.

The rebel leader himself also urges the sequence of the peace talks and stated he would cooperate with the African Union Commission of Inquiry in the investigation of the violation of human rights in South Sudan committed by the rival parties. He considers himself federalist while he says the president Salva Kiir is tyrant. The people hope that the peace talks mediated by the IGAD will end the war which has claimed tens of thousands of victims and forced more than one million residents to leave their homes. The clashes continued in northern Bahr el Ghazal as defectors from western Bahr el Ghazal wanted to reach the Sudanese border through this area. They started to kill the civilians – more than 60 people died, including government soldiers as well. And the tensions in this area might intensify after more than 300 youths joined the rebel faction and some of them have been arrested. The peace talks are supposed to continue on 4 August.



Lala Ali, 20, arrived in the Jamam camp in South Sudan in February. Photo: UK Department for International Development



One billion dollar loan to confront Boko Haram

Briefly 2,000 people have been killed by Boko Haram attacks this year. Now, the fight seems to be close to the end. Nigeria's military says it raided a Boko Haram unit that is presumably connected to the recent abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok. It is also reported that Babuji Ya'ari, who was involved in the kidnappings and the murder of a traditional leader in May, has been arrested.

Ya'ari was a businessman and a disguised member of the Civilian JTF group, the youth vigilant group. He was spying and gathering information for Boko Haram. He is also responsible for several deadly attacks committed since 2011. Previously, facilitated the arrest of other members of the terrorist group, mainly women.

Although claims could not be verified independently, the Nigerian military also reported that they arrested two other female correspondents of Boko Haram. The abducted girls still have not been found. Boko Haram said that they will not release the girls until authorities set free imprisoned militants. The government reported that they know where the girls are but an attack could mean their deaths. The abduction of the schoolgirls is also politically infiltrated. Parents refused to meet Goodluck Jonathan, after campaigners claiming his indifference towards the kidnappings were

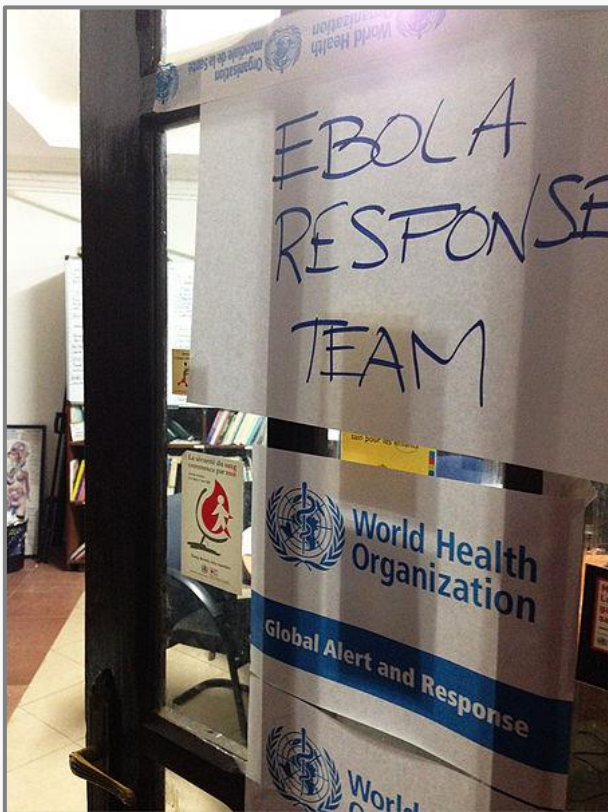
locked out of the National Assembly, where a meeting was scheduled with the Senate president. Patience Jonathan leveled strong criticism on the campaigners, declaring that the abductions did not occur and that Jonathan's opposition only fabricated the story. Previously, she also ordered the arrest of two activists. In May, the crowd was blocked by the police on a peaceful march.

Jonathan also had a disagreement with the Lagos States House of Assembly. The President asked the National Assembly to approve a one billion dollar loan to the country in order to confront Boko Haram. According to Jonathan, the money would have been used to upgrade the Armed Forces. However, Nigerians from across the country rejected the insurgency loan. They said it would only increase the country's debt.

After the Nigerian Army High Command declared that the battle against Boko Haram will soon be defeated, the terrorist group invaded Dille village in Borno State. Five civilians were killed during the attacks. Three churches were set to fire together with shops and residential buildings. Unspecified number of militants was also killed. According to reports by the villagers, the group attacked 6 am. The military responded immediately and fighter jets saved the situation.



Ebola outbreak strikes in Africa



*WHO presence in West Africa.
Photo: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Image Library*

The biggest Ebola outbreak of all times is taking more and more victims in several African countries. The new wave of the infection started in Guinea in March but later spread in other areas as well, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. By the end of July 2014 763 people got infected and 468 died. The outbreak is constantly being

examined by the whole international community as there is no sign that this trend will slow down. The Ebola is a haemorrhagic fever with the symptoms of high body temperature, diarrhoea and vomiting. Those who do not fight the virus can experience internal and external bleeding, and in a later phase even the shutdown of organs. So far no vaccine or cure has been discovered, therefore the fatality rates are extremely high – 60 per cent of the infected dies. Stopping the virus demands serious steps as the isolation is the only viable and effective solution. But in Africa, mainly because of the porous borders, setting up a quarantine is almost impossible.

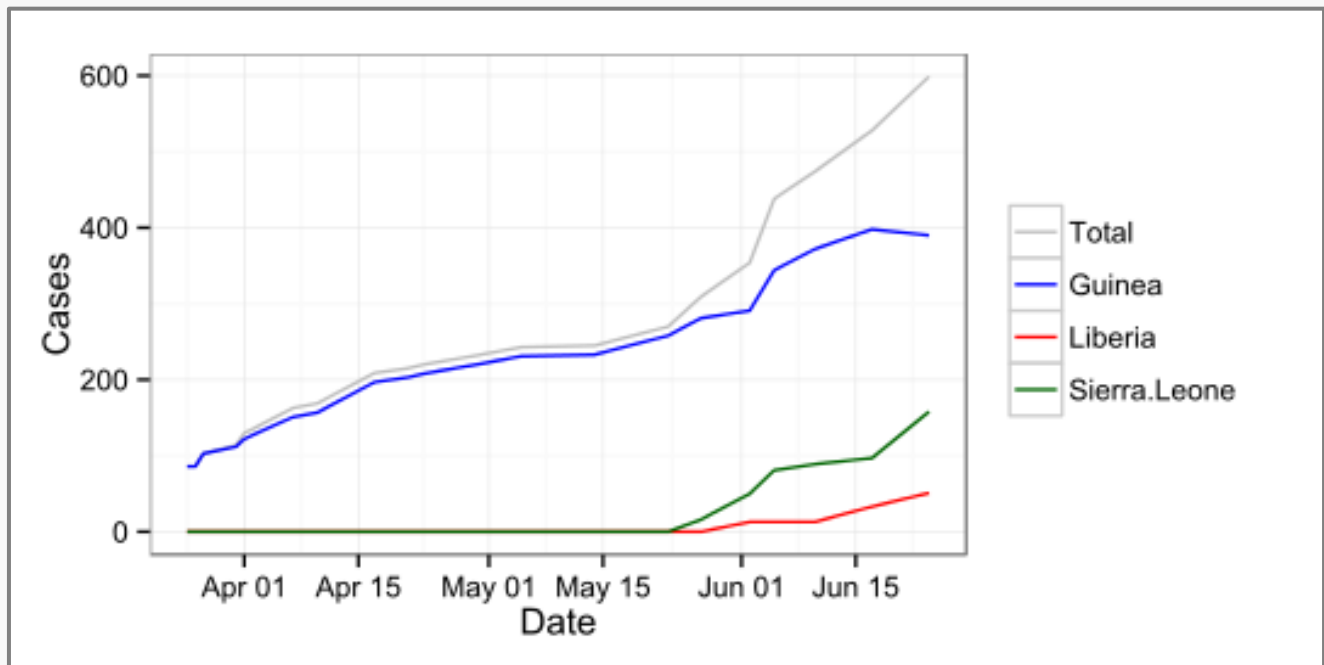
However, African countries still try to do everything to stop the Ebola. They are building up closer cooperation by meeting regularly, examining the medical and social consequences. And in most countries there are isolation facilities with regular check on the medical staff's health condition.

In countries with the highest rates of infection there are individual solutions and steps as well. Sierra Leone's President declared a public health emergency that means the quarantine of sick patients and house-to-house searches for infected



individuals. In Liberia, even schools are shutting down and state servants are made to stay at home, avoiding contacts with others. Now Nigeria is also considering similar steps as in July it witnessed the first reported death because of Ebola. The victim was Patrick Sawyer, a consultant at the Ministry of Finance. There are signs that

can indicate some slowdown in the future; the virus spreads via bodily fluids so casual contact does not cause infection. But from the other hand it can be seen as a simple cold in the beginning and when it turns out to be Ebola, there is a very short time to give any treatment.



Ebola cases by country during the 2014 outbreak. Photo: Gonzales2011 [Wikimedia Commons]

Cholera has taken 60 victims in South Sudan

Cholera is spreading through the Earth's youngest country. So far, the disease claimed the life of 60 South Sudanese mainly in the capital, Juba, but there are many victims in the remote rural areas as well. Some say it is just another symptom of the civil war as many live between unhygienic circumstances in refugee camps. To handle the situation, the government set up cholera treatment centres, but it is still extremely difficult to get proper treatment outside the capital. As long as the conflict is not solved and there is no appropriate health care provided all around the country, the disease is not probable to be stopped.



Bridging the Pacific, Americas new economic frontier?

The US government praises the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) as an “ambitious, 21st century trade agreement” that will “unlock opportunities for American workers, families, businesses, farmers, and ranchers by providing increased access to some of the fastest growing markets in the world.” When asking the Electronic Frontier Foundation, this sounds a bit different: “The TPP is a secretive, multi-national trade agreement that threatens to extend restrictive intellectual property laws across the globe and rewrite international rules on its enforcement”.

According to the activists of exposethetpp.org, the TPP would set rules on non-trade matters, such as food safety, internet freedom, medicine costs, financial regulation, and the environment. It would therefore acquire from the signing countries to adopt their domestic policies to its rules. The TPP, which currently includes Canada, the United States, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam in negotiations, is supposed to further strengthen the economic relationship between these partners. However, when comparing the growth of

the US over the past decade with 1.7 percent to the Asia-Pacific growth of 9.2 percent and the growth of Latin America with 4.1 percent, one should wonder who really benefits from such agreement.

As previous meetings have been held in secret and have seen very little involvement of the public, global health advocates, environmentalists, internet activists and trade unions have deep concerns about what the deal might contain, claiming that the TPP suffers from a serious lack of transparency. Most leaks have in fact been published via WikiLeaks which further fuels suspicion around the mysterious and giant trade deal. Especially internet security and intellectual property rights, but also topics such as agriculture, textiles and tobacco are a matter of delicacy and prolonging the negotiation process. Others criticise that the TPP further exacerbates economic inequality and is primarily a win for corporations. Indeed, the Peterson Institute of International Economics only shows a cumulative increase of 0.13% of GDP by 2025 for the US economy.

What is striking about the deal, is the list of partners who are currently taking part in



the negotiations. Among the Latin American countries are Chile, Peru and Mexico. Leftist governments are purposely being left out of the deal, just as China, which is being excluded from the negotiations, while Singapore and Japan are signing parties. The TPP negotiations are not only taking part behind the back of the

citizens but also create another giant elitist circle. Whoever is going to win from the deal, and whether it will bring more or less benefits to individuals, the TPP is certainly a smart strategy to isolate those who are not worth it being considered partners with the United States.

“the TPP negotiations are not only taking part behind the back of the citizens but also create another giant elitist circle ”



Leaders of TPP member states. Photo: Government of Chile



Religious clashes in Southeast Asia



Southeast Asia. Map: Vervictorio [Wikimedia Commons]

A Muslim and a Buddhist died on July 2 in Mandalay, Myanmar, when Buddhist mobs assaulted minority Muslim homes. The violence started on Tuesday night and Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader accused the authorities of intensifying the violence by not stopping people from spreading unsubstantiated reports. According to Colonel Zaw Min Oo of the Mandalay Region Police Department, hundreds of Buddhists attacked a Muslim teashop on Tuesday after the rumours had stated the shop owner raped a Buddhist employee. Five people got injured in the incident – a policeman, three Buddhists and one Muslim – some of them by rubber

bullets fired by the police. The mosque was damaged and shops and vehicles got destroyed. Next day the clashes went on as the Buddhists shouted anti-Muslim slogans and threw bricks at Muslim homes. Afterwards some Muslims gathered in mosques and prayed loudly since there were rumours about other Buddhist attacks but the police promised to protect them. The NLD told the people not to believe the rumours and called on the police to “take action against the people who caused the riot”.

The Dalai Lama condemned the violence against the Muslims in the Buddhist majority countries like Myanmar and Sri Lanka, saying it is unacceptable. He told the Buddhists to imagine Buddha before committing such crimes and added “If Buddha is there, he will protect the Muslims whom the Buddhists are attacking”. The violence in Myanmar began in 2012 and claimed the lives of more than 250 people so far. On the island of Sri Lanka four people died and hundreds of homes and shops have been devastated during the religious clashes.

On July 17, Sri Lanka announced to launch an investigation regarding the allegations



of rights violation by the military during the ethnic conflict that started in 1972 and ended in 2009. Mahinda Rajapakse, the president of Sri Lanka set up the Commission of Inquiry in Colombo last year to complete the probe among the military forces and the Tamil rebels. Three foreign advisers are also involved in the investigation process all of whom are former United Nations war crimes prosecutors. The commission will investigate also the military's ignorance as for the international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict. Allegedly about 40,000

homes. The fighting precluded the aid workers to approach the village of Wan Wap where 300 displaced people have found shelter. In west of Namkham Township, northern Shan State, two civilians were killed in the clashes between government forces and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army.

The conflicts have not avoided the Philippines as well. In the end of the month, Abu Sayyaf gunmen assaulted Filipino civilians travelling to celebrate the end of Ramadan. They killed 21 people, including six children, and wounded 11 others.

“allegedly about 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed by government forces and the war claimed about 100,000 victims altogether”

Tamil civilians were killed by government forces and the war claimed about 100,000 victims altogether. The UN Human Rights Council wanted to set up an international probe for the investigation but Rajapakse refused to cooperate with them. The island needs more time to make peace between the minority Tamils and the Sinhalese community.

In the end of July the fights erupted again in Burma between the Shan rebels and the Burma Army near a village that provided shelter for displaced people. According to the Shan Herald Agency the government forces attacked a Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) camp. The shelling forced the residents of Pang Sel, Wan Kyaung, Pa Tit and two other villages to leave their

According to Gen. Martin Pinto some of the Filipinos were engaged in a clan against the Abu Sayyaf Group. There were at least four members of the Barangay Police Action Team among the victims, which is a Talipao civilian security force fighting against the militants. Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala has told that they would not give up the investigation until they find the responsible ones, saying “this attack cannot be justified by any ideology”. The Abu Sayyaf Group operates with about 300 armed fighters divided into several factions. Now they hold ten hostages, including two German tourists since April, a Dutch and a Swiss birdwatchers for two years.

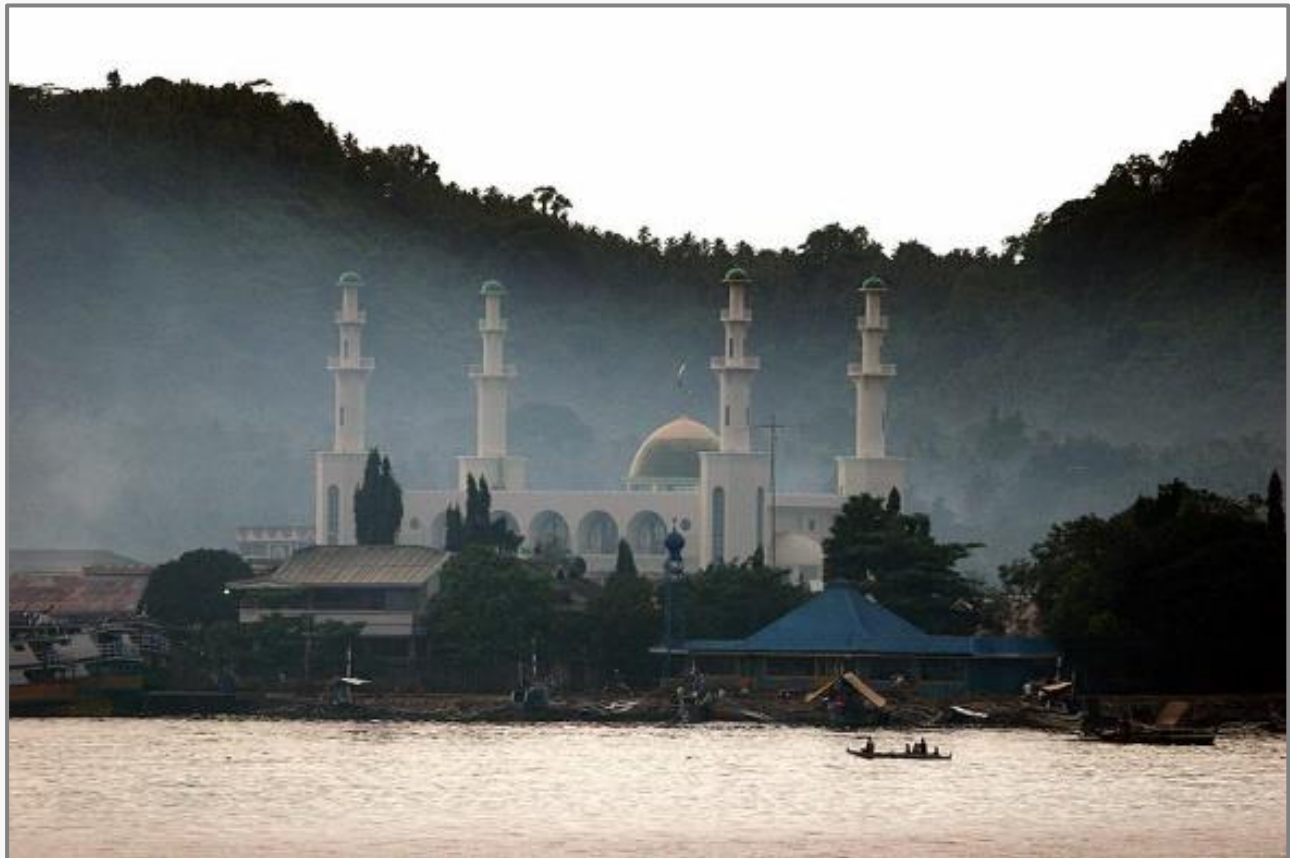
The Abu Sayyaf Group in the most violent Muslim insurgent group in the country



organized in the 1990s. The ASG is accused of committing kidnapping, bombings and assassinations. Its aims by the crimes are financial profit and spreading its jihadist agenda. Their actions caused the death of hundreds of people from different nations. They hold hostages for ransom. The group was left out from a peace deal that was agreed by the government and the main rebel group Moro Islamic Liberation Front to create a powerful and larger autonomous region for the Muslims since it is a mainly Roman Catholic country.

The Middle East has become a training area for Muslim extremists, according to Wu Sike, who has recently returned from the

region to China. It turned out that Muslim extremists from China's Xinjiang region went to the Middle East for training and might have participated in the insurgency in Iraq. But if they return to their country, they are supposed to mean an increased threat to the country. Muslim Uighur people live in Xinjiang and according to Beijing, the Islamic extremists want to establish a new independent state there, East Turkestan. Foreign experts do not think these people have the abilities to fulfil their plans but some extremists have already been to Afghanistan and Pakistan which can make the Chinese government worry.



Tulay Central Mosque in the Philippines. Photo: Al Jacinto [Flickr]



Creating convergences out of diversity

When two people quarrel, a third rejoices. In this case, it is China, the superpower, taking advantage of the old enmities between the US and Latin America. Ties between China and the southern continent have always been close, yet, amidst the competitive economic and political battle between the West and Asia, China is willing to further advance this ambitious partnership. During the last weeks of July, China's president Xi Jinping could be seen touring around Latin America, attending high-level conferences with government and business leaders. On his list were the two major economic powers in the region, Brazil and Argentina, as well as Mexico, Venezuela and Cuba.

After the meeting with the other BRICS leaders on the 14th of July and the announcement of a new Development Bank, with Shanghai as the headquarters, Xi toured on to Argentina, where he promised greater investment in Patagonia's infrastructure. Within the last 15 years, commercial exchange between China and Latin America has grown 23 percent a year, yet one of the main obstacles for expansion of Latin American exports to Asia has been inadequate transportation infrastructure for the growing volume of food and minerals. Xi's investment in Latin

America also sees the investment in electric energy projects, both in the agricultural heartland of Argentina and in the Pacific coast mining countries, like Peru and Chile. Also in the Caribbean, the bilateral trade is likely to surge: China is now Cuba's second-largest trade partner while Cuba is China's largest trade partner in the Caribbean. Cuba's announcement in March, to further opening up to Foreign Direct Investment, increasingly attracts Chinese businesses. The partnership is of mutual advantage and also of political importance to both sides: whereas China demonstrates its growing international influence in the Southern hemisphere, sympathising with leftist governments which the US is stubbornly ignoring, China's position in the UN Security Council is of advantage to Latin American nations, such as Cuba: repeatedly, China has been a strong advocate calling for the US to end its more than 50-year-old economic sanctions. Also for Brazil, as a country with major international ambitions, such as permanent membership in the UN Security Council, a friendly relationship with China is of great strategic interest, while China can praise itself with overtaking the US in 2009 as Brazil's second largest trading partner, registering \$56 billion in trade. There is more



to this partnership, however, than exclusively economics. Both sides know well about their political differences and distinctive social priorities, and as Chile's president Michelle Bachelet put it, there is a need „to create convergences out of diversity". By establishing friendly relations through cultural diplomacy, including cooperation in education, science, sports and tourism, a strong basis for a prosperous economic partnership is being laid. One example is Cuba, where the total number of Chinese tourists totalled 22,200 in 2013, up 18 percent from the previous year. Between the two countries, numerous education and exchange programmes exist, and historic buildings are telling the stories of Chinese-Cuban fighting against the Spanish in the late 19th century. The struggle for Latin American sympathy increasingly sees the involvement of other actors, who also want a slice of its growing economy and are seeking for political and strategic friendship. While the relationship between Tokyo and Beijing is at its low

point, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recently visited the region, shortly after Xi left. On his 11-day tour he visited the same countries as his counterpart, thereby prioritising investments in energy and trade. China is meanwhile keeping a close watch. As a result of this struggle, one can see the growing fragmentation of the continent into "Western-friendly" nations and leftist governments, which are likely to strengthen their partnership with China. China's investment in Latin America, but also the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, which is currently being established by the US, Japan, Singapore and other nations with Chile, Peru and Mexico, clearly sets a sign in terms of future cooperation. It is a question of profit and greater benefit for Latin America, combined with ideology and values; yet, what one should not underestimate while predicting Latin America's course, is its reluctance to simply become someone else's "backyard" on the map.



China meets the heads of Latin American states. Photo: Government of Chile



FARC peace talks continuing

The FARC, Colombia's largest rebel group began to create the final structure of the peace talks with the Colombian government. The negotiations have been going on since 2012, currently in Havana, trying to stabilise the country. The main responsible for the success is Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos who promised peace for the country during the elections.

The current round of talks will include the plan to integrate FARC guerrillas into public life, the demobilisation of the group and the form of criminal penalties for FARC leaders. The FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia have been committing different guerrilla crimes since 1964. During all this time, the approximately 8,000 fighters were responsible for the death of 200,000 people and made many others refugees in different neighbouring countries. Since the peace process started, and even before that in the past decade the number of violent attacks has remarkably decreased but they still mean danger in rural areas and near oil pipelines with kidnappings and drug-trafficking.

Because of the constant danger, there seems to be a public demand for peace –

at any cost. It may be a reason why Juan Manuel Santos was re-elected. Earlier, he did not seem to be successful in the negotiations, but promised to finish what he had started. This is why voters chose him and not opponent Oscar Ivan Zúlega, who wanted „peace with justice“. The promises indicate that opposed to Zúlega, Santos will allow FARC members to enter political life without prison time.

Juan Manuel Santos's rule will probably be defined mostly by the outcome of the talks. The voters have had enough of the system: while Colombia brings off huge economic success, these results are not seen in the social progress. But the middle class is constantly growing with the same endeavours as anywhere in the world: a peaceful place to live, secure job and the possibility to develop. Only that candidate can be popular who can offer all of these. From the other hand, reaching an agreement with the FARC would be just the beginning of a bigger process. The ELN, Colombia's second biggest guerrilla group still commits different actions since the FARC is active. The talks with them were announced in mid-June and will probably influence the FARC negotiations as well.



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Legalizing child labor in Bolivia

■ Bolivia became the first nation to legalize child labor from the age of 10. Vice President Alvaro Garcia signed the new law, while President Evo Morales was not present; he was travelling. Advocates of the new law say that people have to face reality: poor families have no other choice than sending their children to work. However, Jo Becker, director of children's rights at Human Rights Watch, said that child labor is only a short-term solution, and it is actually one of the main reasons for the poverty.

Turkey's Erdoğan looks to win presidency at outset

■ On July 1st, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was officially nominated for Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey. In his speech after the nomination he emphasized that they – as AKP (Justice and Development Party) – will be the president not only of those who vote for them but those, as well, who do not. CHP and MHP are the major opposition parties, who nominated a joint candidate, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. Erdoğan has to get at least 51% to win without a run-off. The elections will take place on August 10th.

France: burqa ban stays

■ The European Court of Human Rights has decided that France's burqa ban is legal and does not infringe on religious liberty. A woman brought the case to court. French officials said the decision has a security base. They reasoned that wearing veil in public makes it difficult to identify a person. France has the largest Muslim minority, their number reaches up to 5 million. In 2010, France was the first EU country to enact the law, followed by Belgium. A fine of €150 can be levied to anyone wearing a burqa in public.

Spanish PM Rajoy meet Catalan leader to talk secession

■ Prime Minister of Spain Mariano Rajoy and President of Catalonia Artur Mas agreed on the date of their meeting. They are going to meet on July 30th and discuss the issue of a unilateral vote about the independence of Catalonia, since the Catalonian are not satisfied with the central government's financial system and they say it does not take into consideration their separate identity. However, the European Union said earlier that if Catalonia would become independent, it would have to reapply to be a member.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Silencing the rebellious ones

■ Tibetan poet and writer Tsering Woeser was placed under house arrest at her Beijing home when US and Chinese officials began a high-profile round of annual talks in Beijing on the 9th of July. Woeser, who had won the American “Woman of Courage” award in 2013, had received an invitation from the US embassy for a meeting, when state security officers came to her home and put her and her husband under house arrest for two days. Woeser reports that she was told the reason for her house arrest was “confidential” but that the scheduled meeting with the US embassy must be the reason. The activist, who publicly speaks out about human rights conditions for Tibetans, had announced the invitation on social media channels prior to the event. With her blog Invisible Tibet, she is giving a voice to millions of Tibetan people who feel oppressed by the Chinese government and restricted in their human rights. Under the risk of damaging Sino-US relations, the US government is cautious in its criticism towards China. However, with three visits to the Dalai Lama since his inauguration, Obama set a sign in showing his support for human rights for Tibetans as well as for Tibet's religious, cultural and linguistic traditions; a step which the British government is carefully avoiding: David Cameron has agreed not to meet the Dalai Lama in the foreseeable future, after the Chinese had pressured Britain to apologise for their last meeting, warning that the British government had “seriously interfered with China's internal affairs” and “hurt” Chinese feelings.

Washington and Caracas improving diplomatic ties

■ Bilateral relations between the United States and Venezuela seem to be improving as they both appointed their chargés d'affaires to ensure effective communication between the two countries. Even so, Washington still worries about the human rights violations during the anti-government protests and about Caracas's accusations that the US ambassador was involved in plotting the ouster of Nicolás Maduro. The USA denies all the charges and says that it is open to further cooperation. It might be difficult as some members of the US Senate are already planning sanctions against Caracas.



■ News in Brief

International relations

AIDS: decreasing number of victims

■ According to a recent UN report, the number of AIDS related deaths has decreased by more than a third in the last 10 years. The number of people with HIV infections has also fallen. UN hopes that HIV disease will be eradicated by 2030. Africa still has the most victims. The 1980's saw the epidemic begin. Since then 39 million people have been killed. Nowadays, thanks to accessible treatment and the growing funds the disease is not spreading as fast as before.

Africa loses billions every year

■ The fact that Africa loses a huge amount of money to Western countries has been obvious for many years. Now, UK and East African NGOs worked together to show what it means in the matter of concrete results and numbers. Their study showed that while Africa has an income of 134 billion dollars, 192 billion is taken out in the form of profit made by international companies, debt payment and even illegal fishing. This way, 58 billion dollars are taken away annually from the poorest continent. The report in its conclusion highlights the significant disparity in the resources and the wrong conception of charity.

US, China agree on urgency of denuclearizing North Korea

■ According to the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, the United States and China agreed that the nuclear stockpile of North Korea has to be neutralised. This unison between the two country was the consequence of two short-range missiles having been fired into the East Sea by North Korea. The US and China demand the UN Security Council to make resolutions in order to denuclearize North Korea.

Child smuggling: a million-dollar business

■ Child smuggling became a million dollar business. Smugglers, trafficking children to the United States earned 212 million dollar in 9 months, between October 2013 and June 2014. In this period, the US border security arrested 56,547 unaccompanied minors, 40% of whom were girls. Children are mainly taken from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico.





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